DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 146 480 CG 011 887

AUTHOR Curran, James P.; And Others
TITLE The Role of Behavioral and Cognitive Factors in the Maintenance of Heterosexual-Social Anxiety.
PUB DATE 77
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association (Chicago, Illinois, May 5-7, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Anxiety; *Cognitive Style; *Dating (Social); Emotional Response; Evaluation; *Interpersonal Competence; Males; *Performance; Research Projects; Skill Development; *Social Behavior

ABSTRACT

Subject groups were classified on the basis of behavioral ratings for degree of anxiety exhibited and level of social skill displayed during a simulated dating interaction. Subjects were then asked to view and evaluate their own skill performance and the performance of bogus subjects during the same interaction when presented on videotape. All subject groups were accurate in rating the performance of the bogus subjects but the high anxious/high skill subjects underestimated (in comparison to judges' ratings) their own skill while high anxious/low skill subjects accurately assessed their poor performance. Implications of the establishment of two types of heterosexual-socially anxious subjects were drawn for both clinical practice and research. (Author)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED146480

The Role of Behavioral and Cognitive Factors in the Maintenance of Heterosexual-Social Anxiety

James P. Curran
Brown Medical School/Veterans Administration Hospital
Providence, Rhode Island 02908

Jan L. Wallander and Mario Fischetti
Purdue University
West Lafayette, Indiana 47907

Paper presented at the Midwestern Psychological Convention
Chicago, Illinois, May, 1977

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

James P. Curran

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

CG 011887

Abstract

Subject groups were classified on tbe basis of behavioral ratings for degree of anxiety exhibited and level of social skill displayed during a simulated dating interaction. Subjects were then asked to view and evaluate their own skill performance and the performance of "bogus" subjects during the same interaction when presented on videotape. All subject groups were accurate in rating the performance of the "bogus subjects" but the high anxious/high skill subjects underestimated (in comparison to judges' ratings) their own skill while high anxious/low skill subjects accurately assessed their poor performance. Implications of the establishment of two types of heterosexual-socially anxious subjects were drawn for both clinical practice and research.

The Importance of Behavioral and Cognitive Factors in Heterosexual-Social Anxiety

The role of behavioral and cognitive factors in the etiology and maintenance of heterosexual-social anxiety has been the subject of recent discussion in the literature (Curran, 1977). Curran and Gilbert (1975) suggested that the anxiety experienced by some individuals in heterosexual-social situations is reactive in nature and is due to an inadequate behavioral repertoire. Skill deficits lead to inappropriate responses to the demands of the situation which can elicit aversive consequences which may in turn produce anxiety reactions. The skills deficit hypothesis has been supported in several investigations (Borkovec, Stone, O'Brien and Kaloupek, 1974; Arkowtiz, Lichtenstein, McGovern and Hines, 1975; Twentyman and McFall, 1975) wherein differences were observed between high and low heterosexual-socially anxious individuals on global ratings of social skill in heterosexual-social situations. However, other researchers (Clark and Arkoqitz, 1975; Glasgow and Arkowtiz, 1975) have noted that raters have sometimes failed to discern differences in skill level between high and low socially anxious subjects. Whereas no differences were found between subjects on judges' ratings of subjects' skill level, it was found that high anxious subjects underestimated their own skill levels while low anxious subjects overestimated their performance. Clark and Arkowitz (1975) thought that heterosexual-social anxiety may be more a function of an overly negative self-evaluation process than an actual skills deficit.

The discrepancy in the literature over the existence of a skills deficit in heterosexual-socially anxious individuals could of course be

due to differences in assessment methods, subject recruitment procedures, etc. An equally plausible explanation is that the basis of heterosexual-social anxiety is different for various types of individuals (Curran, 1977) The major focus of this study was to demonstrate that at least two types of heterosexual-socially anxious individuals could be isolated: those with adequate social skills and those with deficient interpersonal behavioral repertoires. It was hypothesized that while both types of high anxious subjects would be accurate in assessing the skill performance of other individuals, high anxious subjects with adequate social skills would underestimate their own skill level and high anxious subjects with poor interpersonal skills would accurately assess their own performance.

Method

Pretesting Phase

The experiment was conducted in three discrete phases. The Situation Questionnaire (Rehm and Marston, 1968) was first administered to 450 male undergraduates during a large pretesting of introductory psychology students. The Situation Questionnaire is a thirty-item self-report measure of social anxiety and was used as a preliminary screening device. Forty-eight male subjects who fell in the upper quartile and forty-eight male subjects who fell in the lower quartile were asked to report to the behavioral assessment phase of the experiment in order to fulfill a course requirement.

Behavioral Assessment Phase

During this phase of the experiment a behavioral assessment of the subjects degree of anxiety and level of interpersonal skill in a simulated

heterosexual-social situation was obtained. All ninety-six subjects were asked to role play a five minute simulated dating interaction that had been used previously by Curran, Gilbert and Little (1976). Subjects were asked to imagine that they and a confederate had just attended a movie on their first date. They were now seated in a pizza palor after having attended the movie. Subjects were also instructed to imagine that an organization in which they were a member was sponosring a dance and they were to ask the confederate to attend. Subjects were told that their partner was a confederate and that the experimenter requested this conversation in order to evaluate their interpersonal effectiveness.

Nine female undergraduates served as confederates during the simulated dating interaction. The confederates were trained to appear somewhat detached and provide minimal responses. Confederates were instructed to ask a brief question if no converation occurred in a fifteen second interval.

Videotapes of these simulated dating interactions were made and presented to two judges who evaluated the subjects' degree of anxiety and level of social skill. The ratings were done on the Anxiety and Skill Thermometers (Curran, et al., 1976) which consists of two bipolar 11-point Likert scales anchored by low anxiety (high skill) on one end and high anxiety (low skill) on the other end. The midpoint of the scale (6) represented the level of anxiety or degree of skill exhibited by the "average" individual to the situation. Judges had been pretrained on practice tapes to attend to behavioral indicators of anxiety (e.g., knees trembling) and skill

(e.g., giving compliments). Interjudges reliability was assessed by means of an intraclass correlation coefficient. The coefficients were $r = .91$ for anxiety ($p < .001$) and $r = .87$ for skill ($p < .001$).

Evaluation Phase

The self-evaluation phase took place the semester after the behavioral assessment phase. All of the subjects who took part in the assessment phase were contacted and asked to participate in the self-evaluation phase. Subjects were told that the experimenters were interested in their reactions to their own performance during the simulated dating interactions. Thirty-one out of ninety-six potential subjects contacted participated in the evaluation phase. All these subjects were volunteer subjects. Regretably only thirty-one of the ninety-six potential subjects volunteered for the evaluation phase of the experiment which raises questions concerning sample bias.

When the subjects arrived for this phase of the experiment they were escorted into a room which contained a videotape monitor. They were told that they would soon be viewing their own performance in the simulated dating interaction from the previous semester. They were instructed to rate their own performance on the Skill Thermometer for degree of interpersonal skill exhibited during the interaction. Subjects were further instructed that before viewing their own five-minute interaction they would be viewing the interaction of four other subjects in the identical simulated role play in order for them to get an idea of how others performed in that situation and to give them practice in rating. In fact, these "practice" tapes were not

of other subjects but "bogus" tapes constructed by the experimenters.

Bogus Tape Construction

Four "bogus" tapes were constructed, two to represent incompetent, low-skilled subjects and two to represent competent, high-skilled subjects. Four psychology majors were trained to represent these various categories by viewing previous tapes of high and low skilled subjects. These tapes were also presented to the same two judges who had rated the subject tapes. These two judges rated the "bogus" tapes and evidence will be provided in the results section test that the tapes represented differences in skill competency levels.

These four "bogus" tapes always preceded the subjects' own role play and followed an alternating sequence. Half of the subjects first viewed a competent role play followed by an incompetent role play, etc., while the reverse was true for the other subjects. These tapes were presented to the subjects in order to expose them to a range of performances and also to test their accuracy in rating the performances of others.

Results

Group Constitution

As mentioned earlier, 31 of the 96 subjects who participated in the behavioral assessment phase of the experiment volunteered for the evaluation phase of the study. Using median splits of the behavioral ratings based on the 96 subjects in the assessment phase, the following three groups were

constituted: high anxious/low skill (N = 9), high anxious/high skill (N = 11), and low anxious/high skill (N = 10). Although the primary focus of the study was on the two groups of high heterosexual-socially anxious subjects, it was thought prudent to include subjects who were low anxious and high skill in order to compare the manner in which they evaluated their own performance. Only one of the subjects reporting to the evaluation phase of the experiment fell in the low anxious/low skill category and was excluded from the experiment. One can of course merely speculate about the low rate of return of low anxious/low skill subjects but perhaps as a group they do prefer to avoid feedback concerning their social performance.

Ratings of Bogus Tapes

Table 1 contains the means of both the subjects' and judges' ratings of the degree of interpersonal skill exhibited by the performers on the "bogus" tapes. The ratings for the two competent and two incompetent "bogus" tapes were combined for this presentation and analysis. A two (competent and incompetent "bogus" tapes) by four (rater classification) analysis of variance was conducted. A significant main effect $(F (1,120) = 298.7, p < .001$ was found for the "bogus" tape's competent and incompetent classification, attesting to the effect of the experimental manipulation. No significant main effect was demonstrated for the raters classification factor, nor was any significant interaction found.

In summary, all subject-classification types demonstrated good agreement with the two judges in differentiating the skill performance exhibited on the

competent and incompetent "bogus" tapes. Hence all subjects were accurate in evaluating the skill level of other individuals in the simulated dating interaction.

Insert Table 1 about here

Rating of Subjects' Performance

Table 2 contains the mean ratings for the three categories of subjects for both the judges' evaluation and the subjects' own evaluation of their skill level during the simulated interaction. Two-tailed, t tests were used to compare the judges' mean rating and the mean rating of the subjects in each of the three categories. No significant difference was found for the high anxious/low skill subjects, thereby indicating that these subjects were in agreement with the judges regarding their rather poor performance in the simulated dating interaction. Significant differences were established between the judges' ratings and subjects' ratings for high anxious/high skill [t (1,20) = 2.44 $p < .05$] and low anxious/high skill [t (1,18) = 2.28, $p < .05$] subjects. Both types of subjects rated their own level of skill as being lower than the level perceived by the judges. Although the high anxious/high skill subjects were rated above average in skill performance by the judges, these subjects rated their own performances as slightly below average. The low anxious/high skill subjects, while rating their own performance lower than the judges, still perceived their performance as better than average.

Insert Table 2 about here

Discussion

The data supported the contention that at least two types of heterosexual-socially anxious individuals can be defined. Both types were accurate in their evaluation of the skill level exhibited by other individuals in a simulated dating interaction, but differed in their evaluation of their own performance. Those high anxious subjects with adequate behavioral repertoires underestimated their own skill level, while those high anxious subjects with inadequate behavioral repertoires accurately and realistically evaluated their poor skill performance.

The fact that low anxious/high skill subjects also underestimated their own performance was unexpected and confuses interpretation. Since both low anxious/high skill and high anxious/high skill subjects underestimated their performance then this may mean that in general high skill individual regardless of anxiety level underestimate their social ability out of a sense of modesty. The discrepancy between the findings of this study and those of Clark and Arkowitz (1975) wherein low anxious subjects tended to overrate their own performance may be due to differences in subject selection procedures. Clark and Arkowitz selected their subjects on the basis of self-report, while the group in this study were constituted on the basis of behavioral observations. The group of low anxious subjects in Clark and Arkowitz's study might have been composed of both high and low skill subjects and perhaps it was the low anxious/low skill subjects who overestimated their performance. However, it should also be noted that while the low anxious/high skill subjects in this study underestimated their performance, they still regarded it as better than average while the high anxious/high skill

subjects regarded their performance as below average. Cleraly more experimentation needs to be undertaken which would include a group of low anxious/low skill subjects in order to determine the relative contribution of anxiety and skill levels to the self appraisal question.

The findings from this study have inplications for both clinical practice and research. In clinical practice it is necessary to assess both the adequacy of the client's behavioral repertoire and the accuracy of the client's cognitive appraisal system in order to most effectively establish a treatment program. Clients with deficient repertoires would require a response acquisition approach, while those with faulty appraisal systems would require a cognitive restructuring approach.

Investigators researching heterosexual-social anxiety have often selected subjects on the basis of subjects' self-report of anxiety in heterosexual-social anxiety. The treating of these subjects as a homogenous group appears to be another example of the "uniformity myth" as outlined by Kiesler (1971). The outcome of such studies may be influenced by the proportion of subjects who are poor skill and realistic appraisors and good skill and unrealistic appraisers. Clearly, investigators ought to assess both behavioral and cognitive factors in their subject samples in order to test for differential outcome effects as a function of these parameters.

REFERENCES

Arkowitz, H., Lichtenstein, E., McGovern, K., & Hines, P. The behavioral assessment of social competence in males. Behavior Therapy, 1975, 6, 3-13.

Borkovec, T.D., Stone, N., O'Brien, G., & Kaloupek, D. Identification and measurement of a clinically relevant target behavior for analogue outcome research. Behavior Therapy, 1974, 5, 503-513.

Clark, J.V., & Arkowitz, H. Social anxiety and self-evaluation of interpersonal performance. Psychological Reports, 1975, 36, 211-221.

Curran, J.P. Skills training as an approach to the treatment of heterosexual-social anxiety: A review. Psychological Bulletin, 1977, 84, 140-157.

Curran, J.P., & Gilbert, F.S. A test of the relative effectiveness of a systematic desensitization program and an interpersonal skills training program with date anxious subjects. Behavior Therapy, 1975, 6, 510-521.

Curran, J.P., Gilbert, F.S. & Little, L.M. A comparison between behavioral training and sensitivity training approaches to heterosexual dating anxiety. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 1976, 23, 190-196.

Ellis, A. Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy, 1962. New York: Stuart.

Glasgow, R., & Arkowitz, H. The behavioral assessment of male and female social competence in dyadic heterosexual interactions. Behavior Therapy, 1975, 6, 488-498.

Goldfried, M.R., & Sobocinski, D. Effects of irrational beliefs on emotional arousal. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 1975, 43, 504-510.

Kiesler, D.J. (ed.) Experimental design in psychotherapy research. In A.E. Bergin and S.L. Garfield, Handbook of psychotherapy and behavior change: An empirical analysis. 1971. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Rehm, L.P., & Marston, A.R. Reduction of social anxiety through modification of self-reinforcement: An instigation therapy technique. Journal of Consulting Psychology, 1968, 32, 565-574.

Twentyman, C.T., & McFall, R.M. Behavioral training of social skills in shy males. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 1975, 43, 384-395.

Footnote

[1]Requests for reprints should be addressed to Dr. James P. Curran, Psychology Service (116A1), VA Hospital/Brown University Medical School, Providence, RI 02908.

Table 1

Mean Skill Rating of Bogus Tapes

by Subjects and Judges

	Bogus Tape Classification	
Rater Classification	Competent	Incompetent
High Anxious/High Skill	8.73	3.27
High Anxious/Low Skill	9.95	3.94
Low Anxious/High Skill	9.40	3.15
Judges	9.25	2.75

Table 2

Mean Skill Score from Self-Ratings and

Judges Ratings for Each Subject Classification

Subject Classification	Judges Rating	Self Rating	*t*-tests	*p*-value
High Anxious/High Skill	7.97	5.64	2.44	$<.05$
High Anxious/Low Skill	4.78	4.90	.16	n.s.
Low Anxious/High Skill	8.70	6.90	2.28	$<.05$